

Code-Switching In Digital Communication: A Study of Indonesian EFL Students on Social Media Platforms

Uais Alqarnie Sayyidut Tabi'in¹

¹Undergraduate Student in the English Literature Department, Dr. Soetomo University Surabaya, Indonesia
Email: uaisalqarnie@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study interrogates the dynamic deployment of code-switching in digitally mediated communication among Indonesian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In an era characterized by pervasive social media engagement, bilingual users increasingly navigate multiple linguistic repertoires within fluid and hybridized communicative spaces. This research seeks to delineate the typological patterns of code-switching and to elucidate its underlying communicative functions across prominent platforms, namely Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp. Adopting a qualitative descriptive design, the study draws upon naturally occurring digital texts, including captions, comments, and conversational exchanges produced by university students. The findings reveal the predominance of intra-sentential switching, suggesting a sophisticated level of bilingual proficiency that enables seamless linguistic integration. Moreover, code-switching emerges as a multifaceted semiotic resource, serving functions such as intensification of meaning, identity construction, social alignment, and discursive nuance. The analysis further demonstrates that platform-specific affordances significantly shape both the frequency and function of code-switching practices. These findings foreground the role of code-switching as a strategic and meaning-laden practice within contemporary digital discourse, thereby challenging reductive assumptions that equate it solely with linguistic insufficiency.

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ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini mengkaji penerapan dinamis dari code-switching dalam komunikasi yang dimediasi secara digital di kalangan pelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) di Indonesia. Di era yang ditandai dengan keterlibatan media sosial yang meluas, pengguna bilingual semakin sering menggunakan berbagai repertoar linguistik dalam ruang-ruang komunikatif yang dinamis dan hibrid. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi pola-pola tipologis code-switching serta menjelaskan fungsi-fungsi komunikatif yang mendasarinya di berbagai platform terkemuka, yaitu Instagram, TikTok, dan WhatsApp. Dengan menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif, studi ini menganalisis teks-teks digital yang muncul secara alami, termasuk keterangan foto, komentar, dan percakapan yang dihasilkan oleh mahasiswa. Temuan menunjukkan dominasi peralihan kode dalam satu kalimat, yang mengindikasikan tingkat kemahiran bilingual yang canggih yang memungkinkan integrasi linguistik yang mulus. Selain itu, peralihan kode muncul sebagai sumber semiotik yang multifaset, yang berfungsi untuk memperkuat makna, membangun identitas, menyelaraskan diri secara sosial, dan memberikan nuansa diskursif. Analisis ini lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa fitur-fitur spesifik platform secara signifikan membentuk baik



frekuensi maupun fungsi praktik pergantian kode. Temuan-temuan ini menonjolkan peran pergantian kode sebagai praktik strategis dan sarat makna dalam wacana digital kontemporer, sehingga menantang asumsi reduktif yang menyamakannya semata-mata dengan ketidakmampuan linguistik.

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Corresponding Author:

Uais Alqarnie Sayyidut Tabi'in
Dr. Soetomo University Surabaya, Indonesia
Email: uaisalqarnie@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The ubiquity of English in contemporary digital communication has become an incontrovertible phenomenon, particularly within social media environments where linguistic boundaries are increasingly permeable. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok facilitate rapid, informal interaction, allowing users to deploy multiple languages in a single communicative event. Within this milieu, the alternation between languages—commonly termed code-switching -- has emerged as a salient and recurrent practice among bilingual speakers (Daulay et al., 2024; Wulandari et al., 2025). From a sociolinguistic standpoint, code-switching is not a random occurrence, but a meaningful linguistic strategy shaped by discourse context and social intention (Gumperz, 1982; Wardhaugh, 2010).

Among Indonesian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the presence of English in social media discourse has intensified, often interwoven with the native language in nuanced and creative ways. This phenomenon is particularly conspicuous in digital interactions where students alternate between Indonesian and English to articulate ideas, convey emotions, or enhance stylistic appeal. Previous studies have indicated that such practices may serve pedagogical, communicative, and expressive functions (Masna, 2020; Wijaya et al., 2020). Moreover, in online contexts, code-switching is frequently employed as a means of constructing identity and signalling group affiliation (Salsabila et al., 2025; Nur'aini & Fitriana, 2024).

Despite the growing body of research on code-switching, a specific issue remains insufficiently explored. While numerous studies have examined code-switching within classroom settings or singular digital platforms, there is still a paucity of research that investigates how Indonesian EFL students utilize code-switching across multiple social media platforms in a comparative and integrative manner (Gendroyono et al., 2023; Daulay et al., 2024). In addition, existing studies often emphasize structural classification without providing an in-depth analysis of the underlying social functions, particularly those related to identity construction and communicative intention in digital spaces.

This lacuna highlights the necessity for a more comprehensive inquiry that not only categorizes the types of code-switching but also elucidates its functional significance within digitally mediated interactions. Drawing upon Poplack's (1980) typology and the sociolinguistic perspectives advanced by Myers-Scotton (1993), this study seeks to bridge this gap by examining both the forms and functions of code-switching as practiced by Indonesian EFL students in social media environments.



Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research objectives: (1) to identify the predominant types of code-switching employed by Indonesian EFL students across selected social media platforms, and (2) to analyze the communicative functions underlying these linguistic practices. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of bilingual language use in the context of digital communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Concept of Code-Switching

Code-switching is widely recognized as the alternation between two or more languages within a single discourse or communicative event. Early foundational work by Poplack (1980) categorizes code-switching into three principal types: inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching, and tag-switching. This typology remains influential in contemporary linguistic inquiry due to its analytical clarity in identifying structural patterns of bilingual speech.

From a broader sociolinguistic perspective, code-switching is not merely a structural phenomenon but also a socially embedded practice. Gumperz (1982) conceptualizes code-switching as a discourse strategy that conveys contextual meaning and social cues within interaction. Similarly, Wardhaugh (2010) and Holmes (2013) emphasize that language choice, including code-switching, is intrinsically linked to social identity, group membership, and communicative intent. Furthermore, Myers-Scotton (1993) posits that speakers strategically alternate languages based on social motivations, such as negotiating power relations or aligning with particular social groups.

2. Code-Switching in EFL Contexts

Within the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), code-switching has been extensively examined as a pedagogical and communicative strategy. Studies indicate that learners frequently employ code-switching to compensate for linguistic limitations, facilitate comprehension, and maintain interactional flow (Masna, 2020). In classroom settings, code-switching is often utilized by both students and teachers to scaffold understanding and enhance learning outcomes (Suganda et al., 2021).

Additionally, learners' perceptions toward code-switching reveal a generally positive stance, as it is perceived as a helpful tool rather than a linguistic deficiency (Purnama, 2020; Wijaya et al., 2020). Gendroyono et al. (2023) further demonstrate that in collaborative academic discussions, students strategically switch codes to negotiate meaning and ensure mutual understanding. These findings suggest that code-switching in EFL contexts functions not only as a linguistic necessity but also as an adaptive communicative resource.

3. Code-Switching in Digital Communication

The advent of digital communication has significantly transformed the landscape of language use, particularly among younger generations. Social media platforms provide a dynamic environment where multilingual users can effortlessly blend languages in real time. Research by Daulay et al. (2024) reveals that platforms such as Instagram and TikTok encourage linguistic hybridity, enabling users to combine languages for expressive and stylistic purposes.

Similarly, Wulandari et al. (2025) observe that digital communication fosters flexible language practices, where bilingual individuals employ code-switching as a natural and habitual mode of interaction. Jofita and Haryanto (2026) further identify recurring patterns of



code-switching in social media captions, highlighting the interplay between linguistic creativity and audience engagement. In this context, code-switching is no longer confined to spoken discourse but has become a salient feature of written digital communication.

Moreover, recent computational studies also acknowledge the prevalence of code-switching in online texts, particularly in complex communicative environments such as social media discourse (Salman et al., 2023). These developments underscore the growing importance of examining code-switching within digitally mediated contexts.

4. Functions of Code-Switching in Social Media

Beyond structural classification, numerous studies have explored the functional dimensions of code-switching. In digital environments, code-switching serves a variety of communicative purposes, ranging from clarifying meaning to expressing identity. Nur'aini and Fitriana (2024) argue that code-switching operates as a strategic communicative device that enables users to navigate diverse social contexts and audiences.

In addition, Salsabila et al. (2025) highlight that students frequently engage in code-switching to construct a modern and cosmopolitan identity, particularly in online interactions. This aligns with Myers-Scotton's (1993) assertion that language choice is closely associated with social positioning and identity negotiation. Furthermore, code-switching may function as a marker of prestige, group solidarity, or emotional expression in informal communication.

The integration of advanced technologies, such as AI-supported language learning, also introduces new dimensions to code-switching practices. Park et al. (2025) suggest that digital tools can influence learners' linguistic behavior, including their tendency to switch between languages during communication. This indicates that technological affordances play a role in shaping contemporary bilingual discourse.

5. Research Gap

Despite the extensive body of literature on code-switching, several gaps remain evident. First, many studies tend to focus on either classroom interaction or a single social media platform, thereby limiting the scope of analysis (Gendroyono et al., 2023; Daulay et al., 2024). Second, while structural classifications of code-switching are well-documented, there is comparatively less emphasis on the simultaneous examination of both types and functions within a unified analytical framework.

Furthermore, studies that specifically investigate Indonesian EFL students across multiple digital platforms remain relatively scarce. Given the increasing prominence of social media in students' daily communication, a more comprehensive analysis that integrates sociolinguistic theory with digital communication contexts is warranted.

METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate the occurrence of code-switching in digital communication among Indonesian EFL students. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as the study seeks to interpret linguistic phenomena within their natural context and to elucidate the underlying communicative functions of language use. Such an approach allows for an in-depth exploration of naturally occurring discourse rather than controlled or elicited data.

2. Participants

The participants of this study consisted of undergraduate students majoring in English (EFL learners) at a university in Indonesia. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select participants who actively engage in social media communication using both Indonesian and English.

The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- 1) Students enrolled in an English-related program
- 2) Active users of at least two social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp)
- 3) Regular use of both Indonesian and English in online communication

A total of 10–15 participants were involved to ensure sufficient yet manageable qualitative data.

3. Data Sources

The primary data consisted of naturally occurring digital texts produced by the participants, including:

- Instagram captions
- TikTok comments
- WhatsApp chat excerpts

These data sources were selected because they represent authentic instances of informal digital communication where code-switching is likely to occur (Daulay et al., 2024; Wulandari et al., 2025).

4. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through documentation and screenshot techniques over a specified period (e.g., 2–4 weeks). Participants were asked to:

- 1) Provide samples of their social media posts or conversations containing bilingual elements
- 2) Grant consent for the use of their data for research purposes

To ensure ethical compliance, all personal identifiers were anonymized. Sensitive information was excluded from the dataset.

5. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis approach. The analysis was conducted in several stages:

a. Identification

All instances of code-switching were identified within the collected texts.

b. Classification (Types of Code-Switching)

The identified data were categorized based on Poplack's (1980) typology:

- Inter-sentential switching
- Intra-sentential switching
- Tag-switching

c. Functional Analysis

The communicative functions of code-switching were analyzed using sociolinguistic perspectives (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993), focusing on aspects such as:

- Identity construction
- Emphasis or clarification
- Social alignment
- Expressive or stylistic purposes

d. Interpretation

The findings were then interpreted by relating them to previous studies (e.g., Nur'aini & Fitriana, 2024; Salsabila et al., 2025) to identify similarities, differences, and emerging patterns.

6. Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, several strategies were employed:

- Triangulation: Data were collected from multiple platforms (Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp) to capture diverse communicative contexts.
- Peer Checking: The data classification and interpretation were reviewed by a peer with a background in linguistics.
- Thick Description: Detailed explanations and examples were provided to enhance the transparency of analysis.

7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. All data were anonymized to protect participants' identities, and the data were used solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Types of Code-Switching

The analysis reveals that Indonesian EFL students employ three primary types of code-switching in their digital communication, namely inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag-switching, as proposed by Poplack (1980). Among these, intra-sentential switching emerges as the most dominant form, particularly in informal social media interactions.

Table 1. Types of Code-Switching

No	Data Excerpt	Platform	Type of Code-Switching	Explanation
1	"Aku lagi stressed banget karena deadline is coming."	WhatsApp	Intra-sentential	Switching occurs within a single sentence
2	"I will finish this tomorrow. Doakan ya!"	Instagram	Inter-sentential	Language changes between sentences
3	"This assignment is so hard, ya Allah."	TikTok	Tag-switching	Insertion of tag/expression



No	Data Excerpt	Platform	Type of Code-Switching	Explanation
4	“Hari ini mood-ku really bad.”	Instagram	Intra-sentential	English phrase embedded in Indonesian
5	“I’m so tired. Capek banget hari ini.”	WhatsApp	Inter-sentential	Separate clauses in different languages

The predominance of intra-sentential switching suggests that students possess a relatively high level of bilingual competence, enabling them to seamlessly integrate linguistic elements within a single utterance. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that intra-sentential switching is common among proficient bilinguals in informal contexts (Daulay et al., 2024; Wulandari et al., 2025).

2. Functions of Code-Switching

The findings indicate that code-switching serves multiple communicative functions in digital discourse. These functions extend beyond linguistic necessity and reflect social, pragmatic, and expressive intentions.

Table 2. Functions of Code-Switching

No	Data Excerpt	Function	Explanation
1	“I’m literally exhausted hari ini.”	Emphasis	English intensifies emotional meaning
2	“Let’s hangout nanti malam.”	Social alignment	Creates casual, modern tone
3	“Aku nggak ngerti this concept.”	Clarification	English term used for precision
4	“Feeling blessed hari ini ☺”	Identity expression	Projects positive/self-image
5	“Bestie, aku butuh help kamu.”	Solidarity	Builds closeness with audience

These findings demonstrate that code-switching is strategically employed to enhance communicative effectiveness. In particular, the use of English often conveys prestige, modernity, or emotional nuance, which may not be equally expressed in Indonesian. This supports the argument that code-switching functions as a marker of identity and social positioning (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Salsabila et al., 2025).

3. Platform-Based Variation

An additional finding of this study is that the use of code-switching varies across different social media platforms.



Table 3. Code-Switching Across Platforms

Platform	Dominant Type	Main Function
Instagram	Intra-sentential	Identity expression & aesthetic style
TikTok	Tag-switching	Expressive & entertaining effect
WhatsApp	Inter-sentential	Clarity & conversational flow

Instagram tends to exhibit more stylized and curated language use, where code-switching is utilized to construct a particular identity or aesthetic persona. TikTok, on the other hand, favors expressive and performative language, often incorporating tag-switching for humorous or emphatic effects. Meanwhile, WhatsApp conversations are more functional and interaction-oriented, with code-switching used primarily to maintain conversational efficiency.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study corroborate and extend previous research on code-switching in both EFL and digital contexts. The predominance of intra-sentential switching is consistent with the findings of Daulay et al. (2024), who observed similar patterns among social media users. This suggests that bilingual individuals in digital environments are capable of fluidly integrating multiple languages within a single discourse.

Furthermore, the functional analysis aligns with Nur'aini and Fitriana (2024), who argue that code-switching in social media serves as a strategic communicative tool. However, this study expands upon previous work by demonstrating that such functions are not uniform across platforms. Instead, they are shaped by the communicative affordances and social expectations of each platform.

In terms of identity construction, the findings support the sociolinguistic perspective proposed by Gumperz (1982) and Myers-Scotton (1993), which emphasizes the role of language choice in signaling social meaning. The frequent use of English elements in students' digital communication reflects not only linguistic competence but also a desire to align with globalized and modern identities.

Moreover, the integration of code-switching in informal digital discourse highlights the evolving nature of bilingual communication. As suggested by Salman et al. (2023), digital environments provide a complex and dynamic space where language practices are continuously reshaped. This study contributes to this growing body of knowledge by offering a comparative perspective across multiple platforms, which has been relatively underexplored in previous research.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the types and functions of code-switching employed by Indonesian EFL students in digital communication across social media platforms. The findings demonstrate that all three types of code-switching proposed by Poplack (1980)—inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag-switching—are present, with intra-sentential



switching emerging as the most prevalent. This predominance indicates that students possess sufficient bilingual competence to integrate linguistic elements fluidly within a single utterance.

In addition, the analysis reveals that code-switching serves multiple communicative functions, including emphasis, clarification, identity construction, social alignment, and expressive purposes. These functions suggest that code-switching is not merely a compensatory mechanism for linguistic deficiency, but rather a deliberate and strategic resource for meaning-making in digital interaction. This finding is consistent with sociolinguistic perspectives that view language choice as socially motivated and context-dependent (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993).

Furthermore, this study highlights that the patterns and functions of code-switching vary across platforms. Instagram tends to foreground identity construction and stylistic expression, TikTok emphasizes performative and expressive uses, while WhatsApp prioritizes clarity and conversational efficiency. This platform-sensitive variation underscores the importance of considering digital affordances in the analysis of bilingual discourse.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on code-switching by offering a comparative analysis across multiple social media platforms within the Indonesian EFL context, thereby addressing a gap in previous studies that have often been limited to single settings or narrowly focused analyses.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Theoretical Implications

This study reinforces and extends existing sociolinguistic theories of code-switching by demonstrating that digital communication environments intensify the functional diversity of bilingual language use. The findings support the notion that code-switching is a socially meaningful practice shaped by context, audience, and communicative intent (Gumperz, 1982; Wardhaugh, 2010). Moreover, the platform-based variation identified in this study suggests that future research should integrate digital discourse analysis more explicitly into sociolinguistic frameworks.

2. Pedagogical Implications

For English language teaching (ELT), the findings suggest that code-switching should not be viewed solely as a linguistic deficiency, but rather as a valuable communicative strategy. Teachers can leverage students' natural tendency to switch codes as a bridge to enhance comprehension, participation, and confidence in language use. Incorporating digital communication practices into classroom activities may also foster more authentic and engaging learning experiences, particularly for EFL learners who are already immersed in multilingual online environments.

3. Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, this study highlights the importance of digital literacy in understanding contemporary language use. Students, educators, and content creators should be aware that language choices in social media are not neutral, but carry social meanings related to identity, group affiliation, and cultural positioning. The strategic use of code-switching can therefore be employed to enhance communication effectiveness and audience engagement in digital contexts.



4. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size is relatively small and limited to a specific group of university students, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study focuses primarily on textual data and does not include multimodal elements such as audio-visual content, which are prominent in platforms like TikTok.

Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse participant groups, as well as to explore multimodal aspects of code-switching in digital communication. Additionally, further studies may investigate the influence of emerging technologies, such as AI-assisted communication, on bilingual language practices (Park et al., 2025).

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